

What Color Are Green Sea Turtles?

The small model is a life-size representation of a sub-adult green sea turtle that is used to train biologists in tagging and measuring turtles.

Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) have olive-to-brownish heads and shells, with some wavy patterns of yellowish white. They got their name not from the color of shells, but from the color of their meat. Green turtles are the largest hard-shelled sea turtles, growing up to 3.3 feet long and weighing as much as 375 pounds. They can be found in the West Atlantic from Argentina to Massachusetts. Hatchlings live in open water, while juveniles and adults live in the seagrasses of relatively shallow waters. Young green turtles eat mollusks, jellyfish, and crustaceans. Adults eat seagrasses and microalgae.

Green turtles are listed as Threatened in U.S. waters, with the breeding population in Florida listed as Endangered. Principal threats include degradation of nesting and feeding habitats, boat collisions, entanglement in fishing gear, and diseases.

Marine Giants

This huge fiber-glass turtle is a life-sized model of a leatherback sea turtle, the largest living turtle species. NOAA scientists use this model (nicknamed “Lucy”) to teach Stranding Network volunteers how to free leatherbacks that are entangled in fishing gear.

Leatherbacks (*Dermochelys coriacea*) are far-roaming animals that can be found in oceans around the world. In the North Atlantic, they range from the Gulf of Mexico to Iceland, showing up in New England waters in the summer. Leatherbacks do not have a hard shell like other turtles, but have leathery skin. They eat jellyfish and can grow to six feet and weigh 1,600 pounds. They can dive as deep as 4,300 feet and can stay submerged for almost 20 minutes. Females come ashore to lay eggs from April to November in southern states and in the Caribbean.

Leatherbacks are listed as an Endangered Species. Major threats to these animals are entanglement in fishing gear (usually lobster pots), collision with boats, ingesting plastics or balloons, destruction of their habitat, and changes to the beaches on which they nest.